

U.S. State Department and U.S. Marine Corps: Partners for the 21st Century

Using Embassies as Advanced Bases for Information

By J. Noel Williams

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The non-military problems which you will face will also be most demanding-- diplomatic, political and economic. You will need to know and understand not only the foreign policy of the United States, but the foreign policy of all countries scattered around the world. You will need to understand the importance of military power and also the limits of military power. You will have an obligation to deter war as well as to fight it.

--John F. Kennedy, West Point speech 1962

Introduction.

From its very beginning, the United States' interest in foreign affairs has expanded in direct proportion to the growth of commerce and industry. Mercantile interests grew to such an extent by the beginning of this century that the United States pursued a quasi-imperialist foreign policy manifesting itself most clearly during the Spanish-American War. A key security imperative for all major mercantile powers of this time was freedom of navigation, and a prerequisite for such access was the availability of coaling stations for replenishment of the new merchant steamships and the latest warship -- the dreadnought. Thus, the prevailing technology of the day required a global network of coaling stations to assure global access. Similarly, today's global economy fueled by information technology also requires global access. In many ways, today's need for unhindered exchange of information is analogous to the imperative for freedom of navigation at the beginning of this century.

In the tradition of Pete Ellis, who surveyed the Pacific in the early years of the twentieth century in preparation for a possible conflict with Japan, so too should Marines of the nascent 21st century survey the world to prepare "advance bases" to counter emergent threats. Just as Ellis' survey provided the data necessary for successfully planning the Pacific Campaign during World War II, the current network of U.S.

embassies can provide the "advanced bases" for information access required to cope with the numerous and varied potential threats facing the United States in the 21st century. This paper will explore how, through the judicious use of U.S. embassies, the United States Marine Corps, in cooperation with the U.S. State Department, can improve and expand cultural awareness, increase situational awareness for the national command authorities through improved intelligence collection, and provide an information infrastructure to facilitate a seamless communications architecture for the introduction of U.S. forces ranging from evacuation of noncombatants, to humanitarian operations, to full scale military intervention by a joint task force.

At present, potential threats to U.S. national security are non-specific and amorphous. There is a seemingly endless list of contending theories for the future source of conflict. There are arguments for a clash of civilizations, chaos generated by a dysfunctional Third World, population growth, competition for natural resources, overburdened urban centers, crime and drugs, drug resistant infectious diseases, world economic collapse, and the list continues. Any one of these theories is plausible, hence the confusion over which national security policy should be pursued.

Cold War national security policy was artificially simplified by the overarching threat of nuclear warfare with the Soviet Union. The demise of the Soviet Union spelled the end of this organizing principle and with it our threat based strategy designed to operate in a bipolar security environment. The current situation is really a return to a more typical world order that was merely interrupted by a 50-year hiatus during the Cold War. Thus, pre-Cold War history can provide some particularly useful clues to approaching today's challenges. The return of a multipolar world requires the United

States to establish priorities to focus our defense efforts, just as the European powers did during the nineteenth century. A prerequisite for determining these priorities is the development of an effective intelligence and information gathering system to inform our policymakers, and to ensure early indications and warning of developing threats and crises. To ensure our security, we must be able to anticipate emerging threats and develop appropriate countermeasures, hopefully defusing the danger before hostilities occur. The current security environment is analogous to that existing in Bismarck's day, except that the United States, unlike Bismarck, must balance such concerns on a global stage. We can marvel at Bismarck's ability to manipulate the Western European powers to consolidate the German state, but these achievements pale when compared with the requirement to orchestrate similar geopolitical concerns on a world-wide scale. Whereas Bismarck's area of interest encompassed similar cultures and one civilization, today's global commitments inevitably entail numerous cultures and civilizations. Hence, Magyar's statement that "anticipating which deteriorating situations will lead to conflict requires sophisticated sociopolitical analysis and an appreciation of the subtleties of foreign cultures."¹ Additionally, the potential threats are so varied and inchoate that "now the central issue is ambiguity about the type and degree of threats, and the basis for cooperation is the capacity to clarify and cut through that ambiguity."² This need to clarify and identify threats and coordinate appropriate responses might be overwhelming for policymakers if it were not for the advent of information technology which allows the

1 Karl Magyar, *Challenges and Response: Anticipating US Military Security Concerns* (Maxwell AFB AL: Air University Press, 1994), p.29.

2 Joseph Nye and William Owens, "America's Information Edge," in *Foreign Affairs*, 75, no.2 (March/April 1996): p.26.

collection, processing, and dissemination of vast amounts of information. The increasing interdependence of states in the global economy dictates that, "coalition leadership for the foreseeable future will proceed less from the military capacity to crush any opponent and more from the ability to reduce the ambiguity of violent situations, to respond flexibly, and to use force, where necessary, with precision and accuracy."³

Information power has changed the conduct of foreign policy and added new methods of warfare by reordering the elements of national power. As Owens and Nye point out " in a rapidly changing world, information about what is occurring becomes a central commodity of international relations, just as the threat and use of military force was seen as the central resource in an international system overshadowed by the potential clash of superpowers."⁴ Information warfare is one critical element of this new equation even though information warfare in one form or another has always been a part of warfare. The difference is qualitative, as the capabilities now available allow information warfare to be conducted in ways never before imagined.

Accurate, timely, tailored information and intelligence are essential prerequisites for information warfare. In *War and Anti-War*, the Tofflers point out that Second Wave warfare stressed mass collection and emphasized quantity over quality. This is meant as a critique on the proliferation of information and intelligence which can rapidly overwhelm decisionmakers. Hence, the need for timely yet tailored intelligence to reduce the information to a manageable level. Most pertinent for the purposes of this study, however, is the Toffler's judgment that "the shift to a Third Wave means a stronger

3 "America's Information Edge," p.26.

4 " America's Information Edge," p.24 .

emphasis on human spies."⁵ The Tofflers, like Magyar quoted above, appreciate that technology cannot replace the human, spy or otherwise, for "sophisticated analysis" of economic, political, and cultural issues; precisely that type of analysis which is so critical in today's international environment.

Information warfare is an effective means of exercising "soft power," defined by Joseph Nye as

the ability to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion. It works by convincing others to follow, or getting them to agree to, norms and institutions that produce the desired behavior. Soft power can rest on the appeal of one's ideas or the ability to set the agenda in ways that shape the preferences of others. If a state can make its power legitimate in the perception of others and establish international institutions that encourage them to channel or limit their activities, it may not need to expend as many of its costly traditional economic and military resources.⁶

Soft power is another tool in the policymaker's kit, allowing a more nuanced approach to foreign policy. When exercised properly, soft power can prevent crises from developing and is thus much more efficient than applying traditional military force after the situation has developed into a full-blown crisis.

Fortunately, the United States is well positioned to take advantage of its soft power potential through its commanding lead in information technology, and the United States Marine Corps, in conjunction with the U.S. State Department, can play a leading role in employing soft power and, when necessary, information warfare. United States embassies, if used intelligently, can facilitate this effort by providing timely information and support to the national command authorities, policy-makers, and our military forces.

5 *War and Anti-War*, p.186.

6 Joseph Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (Basic Books, 1990)

And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them,
Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain: And see the
land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be
strong or weak, few or many.
--Numbers 13:18-19

Proposal.

Essential to this proposal is an expansion of the State Department role in national defense. Improved communications and transportation have contributed significantly to the diminished importance of traditional roles played by ambassadors and diplomatic missions as representatives and emissaries of the United States. Having failed to adjust to changing circumstances, the State Department abroad has been marginalized and largely relegated to routine administrative tasks. The State Department appears not to appreciate that "the information edge is...a force multiplier of American diplomacy, including "soft power" -- the attraction of American democracy and free markets [McDonalds and Levis]." ⁷ This must change, and rethinking how we use our embassies is an important first step.

Embassies offer a unique window into the political, economic, and cultural milieus of their respective countries. While intelligence and information collection have always been a part of the embassy's mission, the means used to collect this information has evolved hardly at all. As Owens and Nye point out "...the information advantage can strengthen the intellectual link between United States foreign policy and military power and offer new ways of maintaining leadership in alliances and ad hoc coalitions." ⁸ New training and technology are called for to revitalize our diplomatic missions and realize the

7 "America's Information Edge," p.20.

synergy between foreign policy and the military as pointed out by Owens and Nye. The Marine Corps can make an important contribution to this end.

Beginning at The Basic School, Marine officers should be assigned an area specialty. Initial instruction would consist of general subjects required of all foreign area officers and should lay the foundation upon which future specialized study can expand into true area expertise. Instruction at this entry level should focus on general topics of international relations and diplomacy, but should focus primarily on developing study skills and identification of resources with which to facilitate continuing individual study. Acknowledging the inevitable time constraints at TBS, the curriculum should simply aim at establishing a common foundation and paving the way for future independent study. The development of specialized area expertise and language skills would be an individual responsibility throughout an officer's career. Ideally, the Marine Corps would begin recruiting officers with undergraduate degrees in political science, international relations, anthropology, foreign language, and other pertinent curricula. Encouraging graduates from schools like Georgetown's School of Foreign Service to serve in the Marine Corps would assist in ensuring high caliber officers possessing relevant undergraduate skills. If the Marine Corps came to be viewed as a potential feeder for future service in the Foreign Service or other governmental political or policy careers, it would have the dual benefit of providing academically distinguished officers for the Marine Corps and subsequently ensuring State Department and other influential civilian and governmental agencies have persons with military experience. Imagine the impact if ten or twenty percent of Foreign Service Officer's were former Marines (Once a Marine, always a Marine).

To complement the introductory education received at TBS and subsequent individual study, after attaining the rank of Captain, the officer would be assigned to duty for two years in the country of his expertise. This assignment could be with a U.S. embassy, a U.S. government agency, a United Nations mission, or a non-governmental organization (NGO) operating in the officer's area of study.

The benefits of such an educational program to the Marine Corps and the nation would be substantial. Foremost among these would be that the Marine Corps would possess area expertise for nearly any possible threat. Also, the importance of cultural awareness to success in any conflict is well recognized. This program would go beyond awareness to actually providing cultural knowledge to its officer corps. The implications for an officer corps possessing such talents are truly exciting. One can only imagine the added credibility Marine officers would bring to joint assignments. These skills would make Marine officers invaluable assets for regional unified CinC's or joint task force commanders. Of course, these talents would be of equal utility to any MEF commander facing a regional contingency.

During the Cold War it was possible to provide professional military education (PME) on the threat (Soviet Union) to the officer corps through formal schools and informal training programs. In the current multipolar world of numerous but non-specific threats, this is no longer possible. It is impractical to provide adequate training, which would by necessity, encompass nearly the whole world. Now more than ever, information is power. We must empower the Marine Corps with officers possessing the knowledge to deal with the numerous and sophisticated threats facing the United States. Area officer training is the best way to accomplish this.

The world-wide network of U.S. embassies provide an invaluable tool for increasing the situational awareness of CinC's and the National Command Authorities (NCA). Unfortunately, they are not being used to their fullest potential. Just as the need for timely, accurate information is becoming more critical, the State Department's budget has been dropping. In the last ten years our international affairs budget has declined nearly 50 percent.⁹ At the same time, the numbers of foreign correspondents has also declined. The decline in correspondents has been caused by the growth of real-time video reporting. It is cheaper for news agencies to whisk a single reporter equipped with satellite communications to erupting hotspots and provide sensational footage for the evening news than to support numerous correspondents living for extended periods in a single country or locale. The trade-off from a news perspective is unfortunate, from a foreign affairs perspective, tragic. Taken together, reduced State Department funding and declining numbers of thoughtful, in-depth correspondents who develop a true feel for their subject, means a significant decline in the United States' ability to really know what's going on in the world. The training program proposed above is just one way to reverse this trend. In addition, it is clear that the State Department must reshape itself for the 21st century and thereby command the funding necessary to improve this country's diplomatic effort. With an increased foreign presence, future Somalia's, Bosnia's, and Rwanda's could be identified early and ameliorated if not prevented entirely. Preventive diplomacy has not been this country's forte, but as a mature and experienced world power in the 21st century, there can be no excuse for not developing this capability, if for no other reason than it's cheaper in both blood and treasure to prevent than to repair.

⁹ Peter Krogh, School of Foreign Service speech of 25 Apr 1995.

The State Department must ensure that Foreign Service Officers are encouraged and rewarded for developing area expertise and remaining for significant periods of time posted in their respective areas. The Foreign Service officers in the front line abroad should reap the rewards before those homesteaded at Foggy Bottom. Additionally, political appointment of ambassadors should be greatly curtailed. If ambassadors are to be taken seriously by their host countries, and if the U.S. is to reap the maximum utility from its embassies, ambassadors should be experienced Foreign Service Officers who have "grown up" in the country to which they are assigned. Movie stars, political hacks, and large campaign contributors cannot be adequate representatives of a mature world power. We must take all countries seriously and select our ambassadors accordingly.

Intelligence collection has always been an important function of embassies, but improvements must be made. The focus of intelligence and information collection should be on open sources. Most of the information the U.S. requires is freely available somewhere. Embassies should be staffed with readers who consume the local literature and substantiate and qualify their readings by personal interaction amongst the local populace. Covert intelligence is still needed, but the bulk of our limited resources should be directed to open source collection. Technology will allow the information gathers at each embassy and consulate to send their findings and analysis back to a fusion center in Washington. Rather than have large bureaus located in Washington, connected tenuously to the area of interest and receiving limited information, this proposed arrangement would reverse the dynamic. A robust, efficient, and well-informed embassy staff could provide reliable and timely intelligence to the fusion center in Washington. This system would reduce reliance on CNN and provide decision-makers with the information

necessary to make informed decisions. It is ridiculous with our present communications technology that CNN is the only source of live on the ground video reporting. All embassies could be tied to the fusion center by video teleconference and also be able to provide live action-cam coverage of crisis areas. This would improve coverage, improve responsiveness, and remove the inevitable bias of the commercial reporter. With this capability alone, it is hard to see how a Rwanda could be a surprise again. It is important that technology be applied correctly, however. It could be used in just the reverse order as described. In fact, this would resemble exactly what has happened with commercial journalism, where the numbers of correspondents in the field have been reduced and several reporters shuttle about supplying the central bureaucracy with a feed. This, manifestly, is not the way accurate intelligence and information should be collected. Technology should enhance the human capability rather than the human acting merely as a facilitator of technology (a talking head before a camera). Reducing staff in Washington, while increasing numbers in the field, would greatly improve the quality of the collection effort.

The Marine Corps can also make a significant contribution to improving the utility and efficiency of our embassies in four specific areas: first, increased officer assignments to key embassies; second, a liaison cell for MAGTF operations; third, improved communications for JTF or MAGTF employment; fourth, an expanded role for Marine Security Guard personnel.

The previously discussed foreign area training program would provide the preparation necessary for assigning qualified officers to key embassies throughout the world. Ideally, officers could be assigned to all embassies; however, realizing personnel

limitations, the best solution would be to establish priority embassies to staff. Of course, this prioritization would be subject to review in light of changing international circumstances. At the top of the priority list would be those "pivotal states" as described by Robert Chase, Emily Hill, and Paul Kennedy in the January/February 1996 edition of *Foreign Affairs*. These authors describe a pivotal state as "a hot spot that could not only determine the fate of its region but also affect international stability."¹⁰ They identify Mexico, Brazil, Algeria, South Africa, Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Indonesia as pivotal states. Hence, these states should be at the top of the priority list for assigning Marine officers. A second tier of states could be identified which have traditionally been of particular interest to our forces. A list of such states would include the Philippines, Thailand, Greece, Tunisia, Kuwait, and Bahrain, to name a few.

Notional staffing for high priority embassies would be two captains conducting their initial internship to develop their area qualification and one area qualified field grade officer-in-charge (OIC) who has previously completed his internship. This mix would assure a steady supply of foreign specialists while also providing a solid team to perform operational missions.

Having trained and posted these officers, it is time to address some possible missions they could perform. As already mentioned, information collection is an important function of any embassy. Marine officers trained or training in their area of interest could be a valuable source for information collection. Information of military significance would be a primary focus, but they would not be limited to strictly military matters. One of the most important missions they could have would simply be to get to

¹⁰ Robert Chase, Emily Hill, and Paul Kennedy, "Pivotal States and U.S. Strategy," in *Foreign Affairs*, 75, no.1

know the lay of the land. Possessing military training, Marine officers could store away suitable locations for possible future operations such as non-combatant emergency evacuations (NEO's). This could, for example, be the field where their kids play soccer. Equipped with GPS, officers could update area maps and survey areas for possible employment of smart weapons or identify targets for information warfare. The possibilities are practically limitless and don't require particularly sophisticated equipment or large resources.

Potentially, the most useful task would be the development of cultural appreciation. Cultural understanding is one thing that technology cannot provide us. It must be gained by extended study and exposure to given area. Many experts would argue that the limited amount of study and exposure proposed by this paper would be inadequate to gain true cultural awareness and area expertise. From an academic standpoint, this is quite true, but from a practical standpoint, the added knowledge would be a huge improvement over the present situation. As long as we recognized our limitations, we could only prosper from a greater understanding of diverse cultures. Whether Huntington's theory that future conflicts will derive from a clash of cultures is correct or not, it is certain that culture will be an important component, if not a determinant, of future conflicts. Marines, and by implication, the nation, will greatly benefit from increased appreciation of foreign countries. "Ugly Americans" are not the key to success in foreign or security affairs in the 21st century. Intellectually prepared, culturally aware Marines manning advance bases for information collection and dissemination are the correct response to the national security threats of the next century.

Intelligence collection and foreign area training are not the only possible missions for the new "Embassy Marines." A primary duty of assigned Marine officers would be to act as a liaison cell for the Marine Expeditionary Force (Special Operations Capable)(MEU)(SOC). Currently, the already austere MEU(SOC) staffs are required to send numerous liaison officers to host- nations and countries participating in combined training with the MEU. The MEU is not staffed with extra personnel to support liaison missions, so these requirements inevitably degrade the combat and crisis response capabilities of the force. Additionally, despite the high quality of the individuals sent for liaison, it is difficult to achieve maximum effectiveness when flying into an unfamiliar country and dealing with strangers. Using Marine officers would negate both of the above shortcomings. Obviously, with permanently assigned officers it would no longer be necessary to degrade the MEU staff by detaching liaison officers and possibly more importantly, the Embassy officers would be intimately familiar with the environs and at a minimum be acquainted with the host-nation individuals with whom the MEU will be dealing with.

To develop a rapport with the MEU staff, the appropriate embassy officers would attend a pre-sail conference to develop relationships, receive commander's intent, and obtain necessary guidance and direction. Having established this initial rapport, embassy Marines would return to their posts to continue preparations for planned or potential operations with the MEU. The embassy would be an addressee for pertinent MEU naval message traffic throughout the planning, embarkation, and deployment phases. This traffic would allow the embassy cell to remain up-to-date on MEU operations and remain conversant in MEU matters. Routine information culled from MEU message traffic

would allow the embassy to anticipate possible requirements or changing MEU capabilities. Coordinating host-nation support requirements or port calls would be made significantly easier and more efficient by having Marines permanently assigned in country. If a requirement for a NEO should arise, or should open hostilities erupt, then the benefits of having Marine officers in situ would be even more significant. Properly equipped Marines could provide a host of capabilities to assist MEU, special forces, or JTF units.

Intelligence would be the most obvious contribution. Marines equipped with satellite communications could provide video, imagery, text, or verbal information concerning landing zones, target areas, friendly and enemy situations, etc. Forward air control, terminal guidance, and targeting could also be performed using beacons or designators.

Aside from strictly Marine Corps applications, this liaison cell could also function as a facilitating force for a joint task force (JTF). In this regard, the cell would primarily contribute communications capability to allow for a seamless transition of forces ashore, whether airborne or seaborne. Current embassy communications suites are relatively limited and would need to be substantially increased. Given the expense involved in equipping embassies for this role, only select embassies in high threat or pivotal states need be so configured. It would also be possible to have a deployable communications suite tailored for embassy use maintained by the Joint Communications Support Element (JCSE) at McDill Air Force Base. This on-call suite could be flown into a hotspot in anticipation of military operations or crisis situations.

However, all embassies should have VHF, UHF, and HF single-channel and UHF and SHF satellite communications (SATCOM) capabilities. VHF radio would be used for communications with arriving forces whether helicopter, vehicle, or foot mobile. UHF would allow contact with fixed wing assets, while HF would serve as a backup command link for the SATCOM. The SATCOM equipment would allow the transmission of voice, data, and imagery and would be the primary link to a MEU or JTF.

Marine Security Guard (MSG) forces could provide important support to this communications mission. MSG Marines could receive additional training on the operation of these communications systems. A training suite installed at MSG Battalion in Quantico, VA would allow realistic training and a handy connection to embassy Marines throughout the world. If such a trainer was prohibitively expensive, classroom instruction, followed by on-the-job training, would be sufficient. Increasing the numbers of MSG Marines with a communications military occupational specialty (MOS) would also reduce the training requirements. This additional duty would require little if any increase in numbers of MSG Marines, but would produce significant dividends for the embassy. Reliable and survivable communications are on every Ambassador's wish list. The proposed communications upgrade would have to be a cooperative effort between the State Department and the Marine Corps. Both would certainly benefit from the effort.

The ability of the military expert to give wise advice and to get it listened to by policymaking officials depends in great measure on his possessing knowledge in key nonmilitary fields and in seeing issues in broad perspective. A military career officer must be highly skilled in his own profession, but he cannot afford to become trapped in narrow professionalism.

-- Robert Lovett, Secretary of War

The one country that can best lead the information revolution will be more powerful than any other.

-- Joseph Nye & William Owens, *Foreign Affairs*

Conclusion.

Clearly, our methods of warfare and diplomacy must take advantage of our information technology and evolve to meet the challenges of the changing international environment. The State Department and the Marine Corps must evolve to meet these new challenges, and a cooperative effort, as outlined above, will ensure added relevance to both institutions into the 21st century. Accomplishing this goal does not require increasing overall levels of funding, but does require a shift in thinking about how we train, prepare, and plan for future conflicts. An "integrated and interoperable" State Department and Marine Corps, manning advanced bases for information, will greatly enhance national security by improving the situational awareness of potential, emerging, or existing crises for our policymakers and military commanders. While emerging technologies are changing the tools of warfare, the institutions which wield these tools must also adapt in order to take full advantage of their new potential.¹¹ The proposed course of action will effectively leverage the United States' advantage in information technology and ensure a competitive advantage into the 21st century. Ultimately, however, it is not the technology, but an educated, informed, and engaged executive and military that will guarantee America's security. Marines and diplomats working cooperatively in the field can make that happen.

11 Eliot Cohen, "A Revolution in Warfare," in *Foreign Affairs*, 75, no.2 (March/April 1996): p.46.